

Dubai - Desert Dream to City Lights

Story ID : 12066



What is your full name?

My name is Shaukat Muhammad Rafi.



How old are you?

I am 65 years old.

Were you named after someone in your family or an important figure?

I was not specifically named after anyone in my family or an important figure. My name was chosen by my parents and holds a special personal meaning for our family.

When and where were you born?

I was born in August 1960 in the city of Lahore and moved to Dubai in 1968. I am now 65 years old and have been living in Dubai, UAE, for over 57 years.



What was Dubai like when you were born? Did it coincide with any significant events?

I was eight years old when we first arrived in the Gulf States, during a period when Dubai was still under British administration as part of the Trucial States. This was before the formation of the United Arab Emirates in 1971, at a time when the region was governed through treaties between local rulers and the British, who were responsible for foreign affairs and security. My father's visa was issued by the British government, a reminder of the political structure that existed then.

Dubai in those years was modest and largely rural, long before the discovery of oil transformed its economy and skyline. The city's way of life was shaped by the desert, the sea, and small trading communities. Traditional wind towers, known as barjeel, were widely used as a natural method of ventilation, channeling cool breezes into

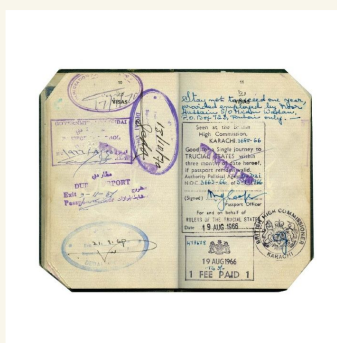
homes in the absence of air conditioning. Infrastructure was limited, and daily life depended heavily on simple, practical solutions passed down through generations.

We initially lived in Al Shindagha before moving to an area then known as the Cola Colony, now called Karama. I would walk to school in Oud Metha. The neighborhoods were close-knit, with people from diverse backgrounds living side by side, bonded by shared daily routines rather than modern conveniences.

Communication at the time was vastly different from today. There was no direct dialing, and to make an overseas call, we had to visit the Etisalat building in Deira. These calls, known as trunk calls (P.P.), required an operator to first confirm the availability of both parties before connecting the line. Telegrams were another common mode of communication, costing two dirhams per word, which made every message deliberate and brief.

Entertainment options were limited but deeply cherished. There was no color television, and broadcasts aired only between 6:00 pm and 10:00 pm. cartoon were shown once a week on Kuwait TV, and poor signal quality often forced us to adjust the antenna repeatedly in hopes of an uninterrupted picture.

All photos/history of my era in Dubai preserved and taken by me.



How many siblings do you have, and where do you rank among them?

I have 4 sisters and 3 brothers I am 4th among them

What is the name of the last grandfather you remember?

The late grandfather I remember was Mohammed Shafi I have fond memories of his guidance and presence in our family.

Can you tell us about the neighborhood you grew up in and how long you lived there?

I first lived in Bur Dubai, in the historic district of Shindagha, among the traditional Bastakiya homes. These houses, with their thick walls, shaded courtyards, and wind towers (barjeel), were masterfully designed to keep interiors cool under the relentless desert sun. The scent of oud and incense from neighboring homes often drifted through the narrow alleyways, and the soft whispers of conversations in the majlis created a sense of community. On warm nights, we would sleep in the courtyards or on the terraces, letting the gentle breeze from the wind towers carry away the heat of the day.

Later, my family moved to Karama, to an area then known as Cola Colony, where I spent most of my childhood. Developed by H.H Sheikh Rashid bin Saeed Al Maktoum, Cola Colony was a small cluster of villas surrounded by sandy patches and rough, unpaved roads. Annual rent for a three-bedroom villa was around 2,000 dirhams. Children played freely in the open spaces, and the desert air carried the distant smell of sea salt and dust. Today, Sheikh Hamdan Colony stands in its place, but back then, life was quiet, intimate, and shaped by a simpler, slower rhythm.

Daily life was modest, yet memorable. Television broadcasts were in black and white, airing only from 6:00 pm to 10:00 pm, with Bollywood films once a week on Kuwait TV. Poor signal quality meant we often climbed onto terraces or adjusted antennas, determined to catch a clear picture. Despite these limitations, there was a deep sense of connection—neighbors looked out for one another, stories were shared in the evenings, and every experience reflected the ingenuity and resilience of people living in the simple but beautiful desert environment. These neighborhoods and moments instilled in me a profound appreciation for culture, traditions, and the creativity of its people in adapting to their surroundings. Channel 33 started later with English language content.

What types of houses did people live in back then?

Back then, people primarily lived in traditional Bastakiya homes, built with thick walls and central courtyards that naturally kept the interiors cool in the desert heat. Many of these houses featured barjeel (wind towers), ingeniously designed to capture and direct breezes into the rooms, providing natural ventilation long before air conditioning existed. This architectural style reflects not only the creativity and resourcefulness of the people but also their deep understanding of the local climate, environment, and ways to live comfortably in harsh conditions.

What area did your parents live in? Did you know your neighbors?

My parents first lived in Bur Dubai, in the historic Shindagha district, surrounded by traditional Bastakiya homes. Later, they moved to Karama, specifically the area known as Cola Colony, where I spent most of my childhood. Cola Colony was a small cluster of villas surrounded by sandy patches and rough roads, which created a quiet, close-knit neighborhood.

Yes, we knew our neighbors very well. The communities were friendly and supportive, with families looking out for one another and children playing together in open spaces. This close-knit way of life fostered a strong sense of belonging and gave me a deep appreciation for Dubai's traditions and how people adapted to their environment. I would often walk to my friend's house in the British Embassy compound, and we would go swimming together in the creek.

What qualities defined you as a child, and how did those around you perceive you?

As a child, I was curious, hardworking, and eager to learn. Those around me perceived me as polite, respectful, and responsible, always willing to help others and take part in family and community activities.

Did you have a nickname at home or among your friends?

No, I did not have a nickname at home or among my friends.

Where did you grow up?

I grew up in a place called Cola Colony, which got its name because it was located near a Coca-Cola factory. The neighborhood was close-knit, with families from different nationalities living in simple homes and children playing together in the streets. Growing up there gave me a strong sense of community and fond memories of daily life, friendships, and family traditions.

How would you describe your home and its facilities?

The area where we lived in the 1970s is now widely known as Karama, but at the time, it was called Cola Colony. Developed by H.H. Sheikh Rashid bin Saeed Al Maktoum, it consisted of a small cluster of villas surrounded by sandy patches and rough, unpaved roads. The annual rent for a three-bedroom villa was around 2,000 dirhams. Today, Sheikh Hamdan Colony stands in its place.

Life in the villa was simple and closely connected to the environment. Air conditioners were rare, so we often slept in our courtyards or on the terrace to stay cool on warm nights. Entertainment was limited: there were no color televisions, and even black-and-white broadcasts aired only between 6:00 pm and 10:00 pm. Movie films were shown once a week on Kuwait TV, but poor signal quality often meant we had to adjust the antenna repeatedly to get an uninterrupted picture. Despite these limitations, the home and neighborhood offered a strong sense of community and a unique connection to the rhythms of life in pre-UAE Dubai.

How did you spend your free time as a child?

Some of my most cherished childhood memories revolve around simple joys and outdoor activities. We used to play football and cricket, and since the locality was largely undeveloped at the time, it was mostly desert with sand dunes. My siblings and my friends would gather in groups to play freely, go for swimming on the creek as water level was not so deep as it is today, explore, and collect shells from the sand. Those carefree days, spent surrounded by nature and companionship, remain deeply memorable.

During our free time, we often visited the British Library near Maktoum Bridge and the national public library. Reaching it required taking an abra (boat) for just 0.25 fils—a journey that felt like a small adventure in itself. Time spent in the library nurtured my curiosity and a lifelong appreciation for learning.

Another vivid memory is connected to family road trips, particularly traveling from Dubai to Abu Dhabi in our Volkswagen (number 2416). I still recall a document issued in my father's name at the Shoaib Checkpost border between Abu Dhabi and Dubai during the 1970s. This document served as proof of exit and reflects the border controls that existed before the formation of the UAE, capturing a small but meaningful piece of the region's history.

Together, these memories reflect a childhood shaped by simplicity, family bonds, curiosity, and exploration, all experienced during a unique period of regional history. They remain moments I continue to cherish deeply, offering a window into life in pre-UAE Dubai.

What was your relationship like with your grandparents?

My interaction with my grandparents was very limited, as they were not in Dubai. My childhood and daily life were shaped entirely by my immediate family and the local community.

What were your favorite hobbies, sports, or team games?

I have a deep passion for preserving history, particularly through safeguarding old documents, currency, stamps, postal history, and photographs of Dubai and the UAE—many of which I have taken myself. I carefully preserve these personal keepsakes in my private museum in Mirdif, where they provide rare glimpses into the UAE's past, from the pre-Trucial States era to the dramatic transformations that followed. Caring for these artifacts allows me to stay connected to my roots and to the remarkable journey of my city and country. This hobby continually inspires me, deepening my appreciation for our rich heritage and giving me the opportunity to share it with others.

Who were your closest childhood friends, and are you still in touch with them?

I had a close-knit group of childhood friends, six in total. Though time and distance have taken us along different paths, the bond we formed in those early years has never faded. Our shared memories, laughter, and adventures continue to hold a special place in my heart, a reminder of the friendships that shaped my youth.

What are the most important family customs or traditions your parents taught you?

My parents taught me the importance of respect, honesty, and strong family bonds. We were raised to value our elders, support one another through all situations, and maintain close relationships with relatives. Family gatherings, sharing meals together, and celebrating occasions were central traditions that instilled in us a sense of discipline, gratitude, and responsibility toward others. These lessons shaped not only my character but also my appreciation for the enduring value of family and community in our lives.

What was the first thing you saw on TV? Do you have any memories of movies from your childhood?

Television was very limited during my childhood. There were no color broadcasts, and even black-and-white programs aired only between 6:00 pm and 10:00 pm. Cartoon were shown just once a week on Kuwait TV, and poor signal quality often meant we

had to adjust the antenna repeatedly to get an uninterrupted picture. Despite these limitations, watching TV was a special event that brought the family together and created lasting memories of early entertainment in pre-UAE Dubai.

How was the weather during your childhood and how did it compare to today? How did you spend your summers and winters?

The weather in Dubai during my childhood was much like it is today, with hot summers and mild winters, but life felt very different due to the simplicity and slower pace of living. In the summer, we often stayed indoors in the well-ventilated Bastakiya homes, where barjeel (wind towers) provided natural cooling, or gathered in shaded courtyards to escape the heat.

Winters were far more pleasant, and we took full advantage of the milder weather to enjoy outdoor activities, community gatherings, and quality time with family. Children's routines were closely tied to the seasons: summer days were spent learning, helping at home, or playing in the neighborhood, while winter allowed more freedom for exploration and socializing.

Back then, people adapted naturally to the climate without modern conveniences like air conditioning. These seasonal rhythms fostered creativity, community interaction, and a deep appreciation for the environment, leaving lasting memories of a childhood deeply connected to both family and the natural world around us.

Did you attend school? Where did you study at each stage?

I attended school in the 1970s and completed my education at the Pakistan Education Academy (PEA) in Oud Metha, Dubai. Each day, we would walk to school from Cola Colony in Karama, which helped instill discipline, independence, and a strong sense of routine from an early age.

My schooling provided a solid foundation not only in academics but also in discipline and cultural values. The lessons learned and friendships formed during those years remain cherished memories. Overall, I would describe my educational experience as well-rounded, laying the groundwork for both my personal growth and professional life.

Did you have any experience with religious education or scholars?

No not really mostly received guidance from the local community and elders, who taught us the principles of our faith, moral values, and the importance of respect, honesty, and community. Their teachings left a lasting impression and have stayed with me throughout my life, shaping not only my character but also the way I interact with others and contribute to society.

How would you describe your educational achievements?

I would describe my educational achievements as solid and well-rounded, providing a strong foundation for both personal and professional growth. My schooling not only equipped me with academic knowledge but also instilled discipline, cultural values, and a strong work ethic. The lessons learned and experiences gained during my education continue to guide me and have played a significant role in shaping my life.

Did you attend university? Where did you study, what was your major, and why did you choose it?

I did not instead I started my own business in Dubai very young.

What was your university graduation day like, and which leaders attended your graduation?

As per my previous answer - I did not attend instead I started my business.

Was there a teacher, mentor, or colleague who had a significant impact on your life? How did they influence you?

Yes, during my time at the Pakistan Education Academy (PEA) in Oud Metha, Dubai- from 1970 to 1977, there were teachers who had a significant impact on my life. Their guidance went beyond academics, teaching me values such as discipline, perseverance, and integrity. They encouraged curiosity, critical thinking, and a commitment to learning, shaping not only my educational journey but also my character and approach to life. Their influence has stayed with me throughout the years, inspiring me to uphold the same principles in both my personal and professional life.

When did you get your driver's license, and what was your first driving experience like?

1976 - My first driving experience was both exciting and memorable. I remember feeling a strong sense of independence and responsibility, enjoying the freedom of being able to navigate the roads on my own for the first time. It was a small but significant milestone in my life, marking the beginning of many adventures and the ability to explore my surroundings more freely.

What were your favorite hobbies and interests during this stage?

During this stage of my life, I developed a deep passion for preserving history, particularly through safeguarding old documents, currency, stamps, postal history, and photographs of Dubai and the UAE—many of which I took myself. I carefully pre-

serve these personal keepsakes in my private museum in Mirdif, where they provide rare glimpses into the UAE's past, from the pre-Trucial States era to the remarkable transformations that followed.

Caring for these artifacts allows me to stay connected to my roots and to the journey of my city and country. It is a hobby that continually inspires me, deepening my appreciation for our rich heritage and giving me the opportunity to share it with others.

Is there a book or piece of scientific work that had a significant impact on you?

Yes, several books and works have had a significant impact on me, particularly those focused on history, culture, and personal development. They broadened my knowledge, shaped my thinking, and inspired me to explore and learn more about the world around me. Most notably, "My Vision: Challenges in the Race for Excellence" by Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid left a lasting impression. The book offered insights into leadership, innovation, and perseverance, inspiring me to strive for excellence in both my personal and professional life.

How did you prefer to spend your time during the summer and winter?

During the summer, I preferred to stay indoors, reading, spending time with family, and occasionally reviewing or learning about business matters, which helped me develop an early understanding of trade and management. In the winter, I enjoyed being outdoors—visiting friends and relatives, exploring the neighborhood, and observing the local markets and business activities. Each season offered its own unique ways to relax, learn, and grow, blending personal enjoyment with an early exposure to the world of commerce and community life.

Did you begin your career as a business owner or in a job?

I began my career as a business owner, transforming my passion for photography into a profession by establishing Shaukat Photo Centre on Yousef Baker Road, Deira, Dubai. I was deeply fascinated by the manual process of photography—developing photographs from negatives to finished prints using traditional chemicals and hand-washing techniques. I devoted significant time to learning, experimenting, and perfecting these skills.

As my hobby evolved into a profound passion, I realized it could also become a viable profession. This motivated me to launch my own photography business, which gradually expanded and, by 1976, evolved into a trading venture, marking the formal beginning of my entrepreneurial journey. This early experience taught me the value of dedication, skill, and vision, laying the foundation for my future endeavors in business.

How did you start the process of searching for a business opportunity or a job?

I began by exploring my hobby of photography, focusing on the manual process of developing photographs—from negatives to finished prints—using traditional chemicals and hand-washing techniques. I dedicated a great deal of time to learning, experimenting, and refining these skills. Over time, what started as a hobby grew into a deep passion, and I realized its potential as a profession.

This motivation led me to establish my own photography business, which gradually expanded and, by 1976, evolved into a trading venture, marking the formal beginning of my entrepreneurial journey. The process taught me the importance of patience, skill, and recognizing opportunities, shaping my approach to business for years to come.

Do you remember your first job interview?

I started my own business from the very beginning.

What jobs have you held throughout your career?

I did not hold formal jobs throughout my career. Instead, I focused on training and skill development to enhance my expertise, while running and growing my own business.

What was your first paycheck, and what was its value at the time?

I did not receive a salary because I did not work in a salaried job.

How did you spend your first salary?

I did not receive a traditional salary, as I did not work in a salaried position. Instead, I started my own business, and my earnings came directly from the work I generated through my entrepreneurial efforts. This approach allowed me to gain firsthand experience in managing a business, understanding profits and expenses, and building a foundation for long-term success.

What are your most significant professional achievements?

My most significant professional achievements include establishing a successful business that expanded into import, wholesale, and retail, as well as representing agencies across the Gulf region. In addition, I made strategic investments in real estate, which contributed to the growth and diversification of my professional portfolio. These milestones reflect not only business success but also my ability to identify opportunities, take calculated risks, and build long-term value across multiple sectors.

What is your current position in your career?

I am currently a businessman and investor, overseeing my various ventures and continuing to expand and diversify my professional activities. My role involves strategic decision-making, exploring new opportunities, and ensuring the continued growth and sustainability of my businesses across multiple sectors.

What was the first car you ever bought?

The first car I ever bought was a Sunbeam, and it remains a memorable milestone in my life. It symbolized independence and marked the beginning of many journeys. I enjoyed learning to drive in it, taking my family on trips, and exploring the city and surrounding areas. That car will always hold a special place in my memories, representing both freedom and the joy of new experiences.

What is the most challenging professional situation you've ever faced?

The most challenging professional situation I faced was starting and growing my business from scratch. Managing limited resources, learning new skills, and navigating a competitive market required patience, persistence, and careful planning. Overcoming these challenges taught me valuable lessons in resilience, problem-solving, and the importance of dedication, all of which have been essential in achieving long-term success and sustaining my ventures over the years.

Have you heard about the heroic acts of individuals or groups that helped build Dubai?

Yes, I have heard many stories of heroic acts by individuals who helped build Dubai. One notable example is His Highness Sheikh Rashid bin Saeed Al Maktoum, whose vision, leadership, and dedication were instrumental in shaping the city's development. His efforts step by step inspired generations to contribute to Dubai's growth, laying the foundations for the modern, thriving metropolis we see today.

Did you get married? If yes, when did it happen, and what is your marriage story?

I got married in 1985, and the marriage took place in Kuwait. My wife is a Kuwaiti national, and our marriage was arranged by our elders, who introduced our families and brought us together.

Following our marriage, we purchased a plot of land in Mirdif, Dubai, and later constructed our own villa. During the 1980s, when our villa was built, we were among the first few families to settle in Mirdif, as the area was still in its early stages of development.

Attached is the photograph showing our villa in Mirdif.

How many children do you have, and how would you describe your experience as a parent?

I am blessed with three sons and one daughter. Being a parent has been one of the most profound and rewarding experiences of my life. Watching my children grow, develop their character, and pursue their dreams has brought me immense joy and pride.

All my children have been educated at top universities and hold degrees, including my 3 children having master's degrees.

My sons, in particular, have been an integral part of my journey and an essential part of my success story in Dubai. Their support, guidance, and shared commitment to hard work and integrity have strengthened not only our family bonds. They carry forward the values of discipline, perseverance, and moral grounding—principles that have guided me throughout my life—and in doing so, they continue the legacy that began with my own journey in this city.

In our family, we have always valued love, respect, and the strength of close relationships, and these ideals have shaped the way my children were raised. While the world around them has changed—modern education, technology, and faster lifestyles now influence daily life—the foundation of family, moral values, and responsibility remains constant. I take great pride in knowing that these principles live on through my children, ensuring that the story of our family and our contributions to Dubai will endure for generations to come.

How do you think raising children today is different from how your parents raised you?

Children in the past were raised with a strong emphasis on discipline, respect, and simplicity, guided closely by daily routines and the wisdom of family elders. Today, raising children has become very different, influenced by technology, modern education, and a faster-paced lifestyle. Yet despite these changes, the core values of love, guidance, and moral upbringing remain as important as ever. Upholding these principles ensures that children grow with a strong sense of character, responsibility, and connection to family, just as I was taught in my own childhood.

Do you have any special family traditions that you continue to practice today?

My family continues to cherish and uphold our traditions, from gathering together for meals to celebrating cultural and religious occasions as a family. We also make it a priority to teach the younger generations about our heritage, values, and the lessons passed down by our elders. These practices not only strengthen our family bonds but also ensure that our cultural roots and family legacy remain alive, guiding future generations with the same principles that shaped my own upbringing.

What values and lessons have you learned from your grandparents?

From my parents, grandparents, and the wider Dubai community, I learned values and principles that have profoundly shaped who I am today. My family instilled in me the importance of discipline, respect, honesty, and hard work. Growing up, I observed their dedication, humility, and unwavering commitment to family and community, which taught me the value of responsibility and integrity.

The Dubai community also played a significant role in shaping my character. Living in neighborhoods like Bur Dubai, Shindagha, and Karama, I experienced a culture of cooperation, mutual support, and close-knit relationships. The traditions, daily routines, and respect for elders fostered a sense of belonging and reinforced the importance of helping others, maintaining cultural values, and preserving our heritage.

Together, these lessons taught me to cherish education, faith, family, and community, and to approach life with honesty, perseverance, and respect for others. These principles have guided me throughout my personal and professional life and continue to shape the legacy I hope to pass on to future generations.

What was the first place you traveled to outside the UAE, and what was that experience like?

The first place I traveled to outside the UAE was London, United Kingdom, in the late 1970s. It was a truly memorable experience that exposed me to a different culture, lifestyle, and way of thinking. Traveling at that time was very different from today, and the journey broadened my perspective, helping me better understand the world beyond my own community.

Today, I prefer to travel and explore within the UAE, as I believe it is one of the best countries to live in. The UAE offers safety, comfort, opportunities, and a high quality of life, while its diverse, vibrant culture and rapid development make every visit or exploration within the country both rewarding and enriching.

How have you or a member of your family contributed to serving the UAE or preserving its legacy?

My family and I have always felt a deep sense of responsibility toward the UAE and its heritage. Through my work as a businessman, I have contributed by supporting local commerce, fostering trade, and creating opportunities that benefit the community. Beyond business, my passion as a hobbyist photographer has allowed me to document Dubai's transformation from the early Trucial States era to the present day, capturing landmarks, daily life, and the evolving spirit of the city.

Among the treasures in my collection are old documents that were passed down to me by my father, obtained in the 1960s, which I carefully safeguard alongside the photographs, stamps, currency, and artifacts I have personally collected and preserved over the decades. This collection has been entrusted to my children as part of our family legacy, ensuring that our heritage and memories of Dubai's journey continue for future generations.

In recognition of these efforts, my family has been honored with a certificate from the Hamdan bin Mohammed Heritage Centre—a leading institution established to preserve and promote the UAE's cultural and historical heritage under the guidance of His Highness Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum. The centre plays a key role in raising awareness of the nation's heritage and safeguarding it for future generations, making this recognition a meaningful affirmation of our contribution to preserving history and culture in the UAE.

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All of these historical items are preserved in my private museum in Mirdif, Dubai, which serves as both a repository of memories and a place to celebrate the heritage, values, and journey of our city and nation. Through this work, I hope to ensure that the story of Dubai—from its early beginnings to its modern achievements—remains alive, appreciated, and respected by my family and the wider community.

Do you have relatives or friends who have been involved in the success of major national projects?

My father worked at Dubai Airport in the late 1960s to early 1970s, managing ground operations for Pakistan International Airlines (PIA). His dedication and professionalism during those formative years of aviation in Dubai contributed to the growth and

development of the city's transport and infrastructure. This period of his life reflects the pioneering spirit of our family, and I am proud to carry forward that legacy.

Do you have memories of key moments related to major projects such as Madinat Jumeirah, the Hope Probe, Expo 2020 Dubai, etc.?

Yes, I have vivid memories of key moments in Dubai's remarkable development. Over the decades, I have witnessed the city's transformation from a small, close-knit community to a global hub of innovation and progress. While I was not directly involved in projects like Madinat Jumeirah, the Hope Probe, or Expo 2020, seeing their planning, execution, and success has been truly inspiring. These milestones reflect the vision, dedication, and ambition of the UAE's leaders and people, and they serve as a reminder of how far the nation has come in a relatively short time.

Experiencing these achievements has strengthened my appreciation for the UAE's progress, ingenuity, and commitment to excellence, and it inspires me to continue contributing in my own way—through business, community engagement, and preserving the history and heritage of Dubai for future generations.

What are your favorite family activities to enjoy with your children?

Some of my favorite family activities include spending quality time with my children, sharing meals, celebrating special occasions, and enjoying outings together. I also cherish moments spent with my grandchildren in the UAE, watching them play, learn, and explore. These times strengthen our family bonds, create lasting memories, and allow me to pass on our values, traditions, and love for our heritage to the next generation.

Where do you prefer to spend your summer and winter vacations?

I prefer to spend my summer and winter vacations in the UAE, as the country offers a wide range of activities and experiences for all seasons. From exploring cultural sites and enjoying family outings to visiting modern attractions and natural landscapes, there is always something to do. Staying in the UAE also allows me to spend quality time with family and continue appreciating the beauty, diversity, and development of country I call home.

What are the most important historical events you witnessed in Dubai before and after the Union?

I have witnessed several important historical events in Dubai, both before and after the formation of the UAE. One of the most memorable was the first air show and performance by the Rothmans aerobatic team, held in the presence of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum. I personally attended this inspiring event and took photographs myself, which are now carefully preserved in my private museum in Mirdif, Dubai. The airshow reflected the nation's ambition, unity, and vision, marking the beginning of Dubai's remarkable journey toward growth and global recognition.

I clearly remember this moment—the simple airshow held on open land, with HH Sheikh Mohammed personally overseeing the event. It symbolized Dubai's drive toward innovation, excellence, and international engagement, leaving a lasting impression on everyone present. What began as a modest display of aerial skill has now grown into the world's largest and most renowned airshow, representing Dubai's transformation from humble beginnings to a global stage.

Another significant event I attended was the first UAE Independence Day celebration, which I also photographed personally, and these images are now part of my museum collection. This celebration embodied the spirit of unity, patriotism, and hope that defined the early years of the Union.

All of these events, which I personally attended and photographed, form an integral part of my collection in my private museum in Mirdif, reflecting my lifelong dedication to documenting and preserving Dubai's history and heritage. These photographs serve as a personal and family legacy, capturing moments that tell the story of Dubai's transformation and ensuring that these memories are passed down to future generations.

What significant developments have you observed in Dubai since the establishment of the Union?

Since the establishment of the Union, I have witnessed Dubai's remarkable transformation into a modern, global city. The city has seen major developments in infrastructure, business, tourism, healthcare, and education, all achieved while maintaining and honoring the Emirate's rich cultural heritage.

These changes reflect the visionary leadership, innovation, and unwavering commitment to progress that have shaped Dubai's journey. From the expansion of roads, ports, and airports to the rise of iconic landmarks and world-class institutions, each development demonstrates the city's ambition and foresight. Observing this transformation over the decades has been both inspiring and deeply rewarding, reinforcing my pride in the UAE and my commitment to preserving its history, documenting its growth, and passing this legacy to future generations.

What are the key differences between Dubai before and after the union?

Before the Union, Dubai was a small trading town, with limited infrastructure and resources, relying primarily on pearl diving, trade, and local businesses. Life was simple, the community close-knit, and the pace of development was slow but steady.

After the Union, Dubai transformed into a modern trading hub, thriving metropolis, with world-class infrastructure, advanced healthcare, tourism hub and education offerings, vibrant business opportunities, and global recognition. This remarkable change reflects the visionary leadership, strategic planning, and commitment to innovation and prosperity that have defined the UAE's journey.

Observing this transformation firsthand has been extraordinary. It illustrates how Dubai has balanced rapid development with the preservation of its cultural heritage, creating a city that honors its past while embracing the future.

How was the atmosphere during Ramadan and Eid in the past, and how does it compare to now?

In the past, Ramadan and Eid had a simple, spiritual, and community-centered atmosphere. Families and neighbors would come together to share meals, perform prayers, and uphold long-standing traditions, fostering a deep sense of togetherness, generosity, and mutual care. Life during these holy occasions was slower-paced, allowing people to focus on faith, family, and community. Below photo taken by me.

Today, while celebrations have become more elaborate and modern, with events, decorations, and gatherings on a larger scale, the core values of family, charity, and unity remain unchanged. These traditions continue to preserve the special spirit of Ramadan and Eid, connecting generations and reminding us of the importance of togetherness, compassion, and cultural heritage.

Did you attend landmark national events such as the first raising of the UAE flag or the announcement of the establishment of the Union?

Yes, I had the privilege of witnessing the first UAE Independence Day celebration at Abu Dhabi Corniche, a historic moment marking the birth of the nation. I was able to capture this landmark event with my own camera, preserving it for posterity. The occasion was a proud and unforgettable experience, reflecting the unity, patriotism, and spirit of the Emirati people. These photographs, now part of my private museum in Mirdif, Dubai, serve as a tangible record of the nation's early milestones and are a lasting part of my personal and family legacy. Here are below only few of my larger collection.

What memories do you have of old places in Dubai that may no longer exist?

I have many fond memories of old places in Dubai that no longer exist, including traditional markets, Bastakiya-style houses, open courtyards, and quiet streets that once defined daily life. These places reflected the simplicity, close-knit community spirit, and cultural richness of the past.

Walking through those areas, one could feel a strong sense of belonging and familiarity, where neighbors knew one another and life moved at a gentler pace. Although many of these places have been replaced by modern developments, they remain alive in my memory and in the photographs and records I have preserved, serving as

reminders of Dubai's heritage and the foundations upon which the modern city was built.

Do you have memories of the old modes of transportation in Dubai and how they have changed over time?

Yes, I clearly remember the old modes of transportation in Dubai, including wooden abras and dhows that served a small and growing population between deira and bur dubai. Travel was modest and practical, and these modes of transport reflected the simplicity of life at the time. Below photo taken by me.

Did you enjoy animal husbandry, bird hunting, or participate in fishing or pearl diving trips?

I occasionally took part in fishing, usually on wooden boats, but it was a rare and special event rather than a regular activity. Even these brief experiences gave me a sense of patience, connection to the sea, and appreciation for the traditional ways of life that were part of Dubai's heritage. They remain memorable moments from my childhood, offering a small but meaningful glimpse into the culture and daily life of the past.

What traditional occupations were common in Dubai when you were young?

When I was young, traditional occupations in Dubai were closely tied to the environment and the needs of the community. Many people were engaged in pearl diving, fishing, and maritime trade, which formed the backbone of the local economy. Others worked in souks as traders and shopkeepers, while some were involved in camel herding, agriculture, and handicrafts.

These occupations reflected a way of life built on hard work, cooperation, and resilience, long before rapid modernization and industrial development. They also highlight Dubai's deep-rooted connection to trade and self-reliance, which later became the foundation for the city's transformation into a global commercial hub.

What crafts or skills did you learn from your parents or grandparents?

From my parents, especially my father, I learned many valuable practical business skills and life lessons that shaped both my personal and professional life. Through his work in Dubai and the Emirates, which involved multiple roles across different fields, he taught me the fundamentals of accounting, management, organization, and financial discipline. Observing his work ethic, attention to detail, and responsibility from a young age gave me a strong foundation for planning, decision-making, and running a business.

In addition to his professional skills, my father had a deep passion for collecting and preserving history. He carefully gathered old documents, currency, and stamps, taking meticulous care of these treasures. Witnessing his love for history inspired me to develop the same passion, and over the years, I have continued this legacy by preserving historical documents, photographs, stamps, and other artifacts, many of which are now part of my private museum in Mirdif, Dubai.

The lessons I learned from him—both in practical skills like accounting and management, and in values like respect for history, diligence, and patience—have been directly applied in my business and life. This combination of professional guidance and cultural appreciation represents a meaningful family legacy, one that I continue to honor and pass on to my children and grandchildren.

What are the differences between Dubai today and the Dubai of the past, and what was life like in old Dubai?

Dubai today is a modern, cosmopolitan city, with towering skyscrapers, world-class infrastructure, luxury services, and a global business and tourism hub. In contrast, old Dubai was a small trading town, characterized by simple houses, quiet streets, traditional markets (souks), and a close-knit community. Life was slower and more traditional, centered around family, trade, cultural customs, and the sea, with a strong connection to heritage and the rhythms of daily life.

In those earlier days, people lived with simplicity and resilience, relying on pearl diving, fishing, local businesses, and craftsmanship for livelihood. Communities were tightly knit, and family and social bonds were central to daily life. The contrast between old and modern Dubai highlights not only the city's rapid development and visionary leadership but also the enduring importance of culture, family, and history, values that continue to shape life in the UAE today.

Do you have any memorable stories about your travels in the desert or at sea?

Yes, I have a very memorable story from my first family trip from Dubai to Abu Dhabi during the Trucial States period. At that time, traveling between the emirates required showing a passport to officers, and documents were issued at both entry and exit points at border crossing of near Saih Shuaib they gave us entry and exit permits. We made the journey in our Volkswagen car, navigating through the desert along rough, unpaved roads, as proper highways did not yet exist.

The trip was challenging but unforgettable, offering a unique glimpse into life and travel in those early days. It taught us resilience, patience, and adaptability, while also creating cherished family memories. That journey, like many others from that era, reflects the simplicity, courage, and determination of people living in Dubai before the rapid modernization of the UAE.

What changes have you noticed in Dubai's weather over time?

Over the decades, I have noticed some subtle changes in Dubai's weather and environment. Summers feel hotter and longer, while winters remain mild but with slightly warmer days than in the past. Urbanization and the expansion of concrete and high-rise buildings have also affected airflow and natural cooling, making traditional methods like courtyards and wind towers less common in modern neighborhoods.

Despite these changes, the city has adapted with modern air conditioning, green spaces, and urban planning, making life comfortable even in extreme heat. Observing these changes over time highlights the balance between Dubai's rapid development and its natural environment, and underscores the importance of preserving heritage methods of coping with the climate, such as the use of shade, ventilation, and community gathering spaces.

Are there any stories or folktales you remember from the past?

Yes, I remember many stories and local tales from my childhood in Dubai, passed down through my family and the community. One story that stayed with me was about the old neighborhoods of Bur Dubai and Shindagha, where families relied on the sea, trade, and simple crafts for their livelihoods. Elders would tell us how fishing trips and pearl diving were not just work, but also lessons in patience, teamwork, and respect for nature. These tales often highlighted the ingenuity of people who lived with very

few resources yet maintained strong community bonds.

I also recall stories about the wind towers in Bastakiya homes, which were said to “bring life into the house” by cooling the air naturally. Children were encouraged to explore the courtyards, streets, and rooftops safely, turning ordinary life into small adventures. These stories, along with my own experiences, shaped my love for preserving history, inspiring me to photograph and safeguard documents, currency, stamps, and old neighborhoods. Many of these memories are now part of my private museum in Mirdif, Dubai, helping keep alive the heritage and culture of Dubai from the pre-Trucial States era to the present.

What are your most memorable experiences from folk and national events or celebrations you participated in? How were they celebrated?

Some of my most memorable experiences from folk and national celebrations were during Ramadan and Eid, as well as smaller community gatherings in the older neighborhoods of Dubai, such as Bur Dubai, Shindagha, and Karama. These events were simple yet full of warmth, with families and neighbors coming together to share meals, offer prayers, and participate in traditional customs. I especially remember the joy of children running through the streets, the aroma of special dishes being prepared, and the sounds of music and laughter echoing through the neighborhoods.

As a young enthusiast with a camera, I often documented these moments, capturing the everyday joy and spirit of community that defined life in old Dubai. These photographs now form part of my private museum in Mirdif, Dubai, preserving not just the grand national celebrations, but also the smaller, intimate folk traditions that reflect the culture, resilience, and unity of the people.

Experiencing and recording these events gave me a deep appreciation for Dubai’s heritage, showing how ordinary moments, family gatherings, and local customs were just as important in shaping the city’s identity as the larger national milestones.

What was the experience of performing Hajj or Umrah like in the past?

In the past, performing Hajj or Umrah was a profoundly spiritual and transformative journey. I traveled both by road and by air from Dubai, and despite the long and sometimes challenging trips, the experience strengthened my faith, patience, and sense of unity with fellow pilgrims. Travel during that time was far less comfortable

than it is today, with basic accommodations and limited conveniences, which made the journey even more humbling and reflective.

What traditional foods or dishes did you enjoy, and are they still prepared today?

Living in Dubai, UAE, traditional Emirati foods were an important part of daily life and family culture. Dishes like harees, thareed, machboos, balaleet, and luqaimat were commonly enjoyed, especially during family gatherings, religious occasions, and festive celebrations. I have fond memories of sharing these meals with relatives and neighbors, savoring the flavors while enjoying the warmth of family and community.

These traditional dishes are still prepared today and remain a cherished part of Emirati culture, connecting the past with the present and preserving the culinary heritage of the UAE. Experiencing and enjoying these foods helped me appreciate not just the flavors, but also the values of family, hospitality, and cultural continuity that they represent.

What customs and traditions were associated with marriage and celebrations, particularly those you took part in?

In the past, marriages and celebrations were deeply rooted in family traditions and community participation. Weddings involved elaborate gatherings with music, traditional dances, and sharing of local cuisine, where every detail emphasized respect for elders, hospitality, and the unity of families.

I had the opportunity to witness and take part in these celebrations, and they left me with lasting memories of joy, togetherness, and cultural pride. These events were not just personal milestones but also expressions of community values, reinforcing bonds between families and neighbors. Participating in them gave me a strong appreciation for the rich customs and heritage that continue to shape social life today.

Attach photo taken by me at local wedding in Dubai.

What were Dubai's markets like in the past?

In the past, Dubai's markets, gold souks, al wasl souk were vibrant centers of trade and community life. Merchants sold spices, textiles, gold, perfumes, and traditional goods, and the air was filled with the sounds of bargaining, conversation, and daily activity. The markets were colorful, lively, and bustling, reflecting the energy and ingenuity of

the local people.

Visiting the souks was not just about shopping; it was an experience of culture, tradition, and social connection, offering a window into the rhythms of everyday life in old Dubai. These markets were places where families, neighbors, and travelers interacted, exchanged stories, and shared knowledge, making them central to the community and heritage of the city.

What are you most proud of in Dubai's development and transformation?

Having lived in Dubai for over 57 years, I have witnessed firsthand the city's extraordinary transformation. When I first arrived, Dubai was a small trading town with simple houses, sandy streets, wooden abras, and bustling traditional souks. Life was slower, and the community was close-knit, with families relying on one another and traditions guiding daily life.

Over the decades, I have seen Dubai grow into a global hub of business, innovation, tourism, and culture, while still valuing and preserving its heritage. From the wind-towered Bastakiya homes and quiet neighborhoods of my childhood to the modern skyline, advanced infrastructure, and international events of today, the change has been breathtaking.

My family have been part of this journey, sharing in the experiences, challenges, and opportunities that Dubai has offered. Seeing my family grow alongside the city has made this transformation even more meaningful, as we have built our lives together in a place that has continually evolved.

What makes me most proud is how Dubai has achieved such rapid development without losing its soul. The city's visionary leadership, resilience, and community spirit have turned it into a place that offers opportunity, safety, and a high quality of life. Living through this transformation for more than half a century, and sharing it with my family, has been a profoundly emotional and inspiring journey—a true testament to both the Dubai of the past and the Dubai of today.

What values and principles do you believe define Dubai's society, and what would you like to pass on to future generations?

Dubai's society is defined by vision, resilience, innovation, and a deep respect for heritage. It is truly remarkable how the UAE has built a nation from humble beginnings into a country with world-class infrastructure, opportunities, and global recognition. Witnessing this transformation over the past 57 years has been both inspiring and humbling.

I am proud of the country's achievements over the past five decades, guided by the wisdom and foresight of its leaders, and I feel fortunate to have been part of this journey alongside my family.

For future generations, I hope to pass on the importance of hard work, unity, cultural

respect, and perseverance. Most importantly, I want them to understand that with determination, vision, and collaboration, nothing is impossible, and that preserving both our heritage and values is as important as striving for progress and success.

What was the atmosphere like during big family events, and what made them special?

During big family events, the atmosphere was always lively, joyful, and full of warmth. Relatives would gather to celebrate with traditional foods, music, and storytelling, filling the home with laughter and conversation. What made these gatherings truly special was the love, respect, and unity among family members, along with the opportunity to pass down traditions, share life lessons, and create lasting memories.

These occasions were more than celebrations—they were a living expression of our culture and values, connecting generations and strengthening the bonds that held our family together. Even now, recalling those moments brings a deep sense of belonging and gratitude for the strong family ties that have shaped my life.

Have you been influenced by neighboring Gulf countries and the Arab region? How?

From my perspective, I believe that Dubai has been the true influencer in the Gulf and the wider Arab region. Over the past 57 years, I have seen how Dubai's vision, innovation, and development have set a benchmark that others aspire to follow. Many cities in the region look to Dubai as an example, yet Dubai itself remains unique, always ahead, always pioneering, and never imitating others.

In my view, Dubai's growth, ambition, and ability to balance tradition with modernity have made it a model for progress—not a follower but a leader. Being part of this city's journey, alongside my family, has been inspiring and humbling, as I have seen firsthand how Dubai continues to shape the region rather than be shaped by it.

What does Dubai and the UAE mean to you on a personal level?

On a personal level, Dubai and the UAE represent opportunity, progress, and pride. Having lived here for over 57 years, I have seen the city grow from a small trading town into a modern, global hub, and I feel a deep connection to that journey.

To me, Dubai is more than a city—it has a soul, a personality, and feelings. If you treat it with respect and dedication, it will reward you in kind. It is a place where traditions

and modernity coexist, where family life, culture, and community are cherished, and where one can witness the power of vision, resilience, and determination.

The UAE is not just a home—it is a source of inspiration, a place where my family and I have built our lives, shared experiences, and contributed in our own way. It symbolizes growth, hope, and the extraordinary achievements possible when vision meets dedication, and its spirit continues to touch everyone who is part of its story.

What message would you like to send to your parents?

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my parents for their unconditional love, guidance, and sacrifices. Their values, patience, and support have shaped the person I am today and taught me the importance of respect, honesty, and perseverance.

Everything I have achieved is a reflection of their prayers, encouragement, and unwavering belief in me. I will always remain thankful to them and keep them in my prayers.

What message would you like to send to decision makers in Dubai?

Thank you. His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum

What advice or message would you like to leave for future generations?

My advice to future generations is to value education, hard work, and integrity. Always stay connected to your roots, heritage, and traditions, while embracing positive change, innovation, and growth. Respect your parents, elders, and community, and strive to leave a meaningful impact on society through your actions.

Life will bring challenges, but with patience, perseverance, and unity, you can overcome them and build a brighter, stronger future for yourselves and for those who come after you. Remember that your heritage and culture are your foundation, and carrying them forward with pride will ensure that the values and lessons of the past continue to inspire generations to come.

What idea or initiative would you like to propose to further enhance Dubai's status?

By preserving Dubai's history and cultural heritage, the city can continue to be a global example of progress, innovation, and pride. The UAE's visionary leadership has transformed it into a hub of opportunity, prosperity, and harmony, and future generations should stay connected to their roots while embracing innovation, working with hard work, integrity, and unity to build an even brighter future for all.

Do you have any poem about Dubai that was never published?

I do not have an unpublished poem specifically about Dubai. However, I have authored and contributed to many works that document and celebrate Dubai's traditions, cultural heritage, and history. Through these publications, my aim has always been to preserve the Emirate's rich legacy and to share its story, values, and spirit with present and future generations, ensuring that the history and culture of Dubai remain alive and appreciated. Here are some of my work.